

Notes from the Editor's Desk



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I always enjoy chatting with my niece, Rachel, so was disappointed the other day when I stopped by my brother's house and she wasn't home. It turned out she had taken a friend shopping for a homecoming dress. Interestingly, it wasn't a particularly close friend. And Rachel didn't really want to go. But this person didn't have any other way to get to the mall and she didn't have anyone else to go with her. So Rachel, being a genuinely nice person, took her.

However, most of us don't do things for purely altruistic reasons. Rather, our motivating force is usually: "What's in it for me?"

I was reminded of this recently when I asked an engineering friend if his firm was going to submit a project to AISC's Engineering Awards of Excellence competition. Business is good and time is short, he said, and besides, he wanted to know what was in it for him.

My first thought was to appeal to his ego. Hey, doesn't everyone want to look good in front of their peers? But from a business standpoint, that's not a sufficient reason to take the time and effort needed to put together a first class entry to a major awards competition.

The better answer has to do with business development opportunities. Unfortunately, engineering firms tend to be incredibly myopic when it comes to marketing, especially when compared with other professional service companies—such as architects.

Good marketing has numerous facets,

but one basic concept is to keep your name in front of potential clients and remind them about your capabilities and successes.

Participation in an awards program is an easy way to accomplish that goal. The work that goes into producing the entry is easily transferable to the creation of a marketing piece extolling the virtues of your work on a particular project (if it's good enough to enter, then the project is good enough to tout to your potential clients).

And if you receive an award, it creates a built-in marketing opportunity.

There always seems to be a reason not to expend resources on marketing. When times are good, the rationale is that there's no need for expensive business development programs. And when times are slow, marketing seems to be an easy budget cut.

But a good friend of mine once taught me that the time to market is now. If times are good, you need to prepare for a future downturn. And if times are bad, then you need to act to build your business.

AISC is currently accepting entries for two award programs: The Engineering Awards of Excellence (see pages 59-60) and the IDEAS Awards (see pages 26-27). Best of luck to all of you—both on the awards and with your marketing efforts.